

Real Stories of Young Entrepreneurs in Wisconsin

Name: Austin White-Pentony

School & Grade: 12th grade at Verona Area High School

Business Name: MadTown Phone Sales

What inspired you to start your business? Tell us about your inspiration, your idea and how it became a reality.

In late – 2010 after being quoted \$200 by Apple to fix the cracked screen on my iPhone, I decided to take on the screen repair myself. With a suction cup, screwdriver, and the help of a You Tube video, I was able to replace the screen within an hour. A few months later, I realized that I would need to find a way to pay for college given the harsh economic times and my parents' job in state government and real estate. So, I started purchasing beat up iPhones with the hope of turning a profit. With a fair amount of success, I gained some confidence, and since then, my business has purchased hundreds of cell phones locally, repaired them if needed and sold them worldwide through eBay.

Describe your product / service, purpose / goals, features / benefits, unique selling point.

My strategy is simple. Buy phones, fix phones, sell phones, and ship phones. I purchase the phones locally in Madison, Wisconsin because the market is smaller and prices are lower. I buy all types of phones, from Androids to iPhones. If the phone has a problem, I will fix it. I post the phones with the most detailed descriptions and close-up photos on my eBay store where millions of customers shop. I price the phones competitively and offer to ship them around the globe at a very low price.

Free shipping and 14-day return period are offered to bring in more customers. One-day shipping is offered for \$9.99, a price that you will not find elsewhere. Moreover, I respond to most customer emails in less than one hour. Worldwide shipping is offered to over 100 countries starting at just \$19.99.

Once a phone sells, I immediately provide tracking information and always ship within 24 hours. Also, my customers have told me that they really appreciate the innovative packaging that I use. I have invested in what I believe is the future shipping box for small electronics. The 200-pound crush proof box is called a retention box and it essentially suspends the product in the box to completely absorb shock and to mitigate damage while in route.

Finally, if the customer isn't happy, I send them a prepaid return label to eliminate stress. I've learned that if the buyer isn't happy, there is no way for me to be happy. Once the buyer is happy, I can say I've accomplished something.

Tell us about yourself and how you make your business succeed.

Let's face it there are hundreds of thousands of eBay sellers out there. It's a question that every small business asks itself, but it's a very important one: How am I going to stand out from the rest?

As anyone who shops for used items online knows, it is hard to be confident about purchasing something without actually holding it in your hands. To boost online confidence in my buyers, I worked hard in my first year to achieve Top-Rated seller status on eBay. This is something that only 1% of eBay sellers have accomplished. They know that I am committed to shipping out their package the same day in which they order it. They can see that I have a proven track record of

describing the phones with great deal of detail and close up photos. Finally, they don't have to worry because they know that if anything goes wrong, I will take the fault and offer a full refund. These are all little confidence boosters that I have progressively built upon over time.

I also know that there are certain investments that I can take that will make my customers happy and increase sales in the long run. I recently purchased over \$500 in high tech packaging. I know that while the boxes are expensive, they will pay off, as I will have fewer damaged goods while in shipment. Also, the boxes are a lot stronger and can be used for returns or to send me used phones for my cell phone buyback program.

Finally, I've demonstrated drive as visible by my 300 positive customer feedback ratings. I often wake up at 6am to fill orders and go to the post office before school so that my customers can get their phones quickly. I'll fill orders as late as 5:15 pm to get them out the door and to the post office before it closes at 5:30 pm. I pay for my customers return shipping so that they have one less thing to stress over. Also, whenever I am faced with an obstacle, such as dealing with international buyers who want to return a cell phone, I take the hit and go above and beyond to make sure that each and every customer is happy. I do not want to let one angry customer ruin my online feedback and stellar reputation. It's just not worth it.

Receiving positive feedback is what motivates me. Making a profit is what rewards me.

What are your future goals and vision for your business? How do you propose to develop your business?

With college coming, many of my friends will be going to very expensive out of state universities. These friends will undoubtedly need money to pay for college. I think I can help them out by recruiting them to work with me in my business. After training them, I will have an established network of people buying phones for me in multiple states. I am going to test this plan in early 2012 with a friend currently attending school in Minnesota before I roll it out on multiple college campuses. They will get a 40% cut on the profits of each phone that I sell. This is a very fair pay since it does not take more than a few minutes to buy each phone.

I also plan to expand with cell phone buyback program that I recently started. With each phone that I sell on eBay, I include a postcard describing the process. The buyer simply puts their old phone into the box that their new phone comes in and they put it in their mailbox with prepaid postage. It is an easy way to increase my sales because I do not need to lift a finger to buy the phones.

In the long term, I plan on designing a website where people can get cash by sending me their used phones from across the nation. This needs to be something that I research heavily because I would need to build even more online trust and there are other legal aspects, as well.

Finally, I have set a goal to reach \$100,000 in sales for 2012. I think that this is a realistic goal as I hope to have three to four people purchasing phones for me. So far, the month of January has been very strong and I am well on my way!